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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0299

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SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE CONVICTS ARRIVE

REF: FREETOWN 348 (NOTAL)

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: On November 1, eight convicts from the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) arrived at Mpanga prison in southern Rwanda where they will serve their sentences, ranging from 15 to 52 years, for crimes committed during Sierra Leone's civil war. Their arrival brings renewed energy to calls for International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) convicts to serve their sentences in Rwanda.  
END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) The SCSL and the Government of Rwanda (GOR) in March signed an agreement allowing SCSL convicts to serve their prison terms in Rwanda for crimes committed during Sierra Leone's civil war. The prisoners are some of the most high-level leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel movement and perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity including rape, murder, conscription of child soldiers, and taking of "bush brides."

13. (SBU) On October 16, DCM and Emboff accompanied representatives from SCSL to Mpanga prison to assess prison conditions and readiness for the prisoner transfer. The special ward, which the GOR constructed with assistance from the Dutch Embassy, can house 27 high-level prisoners. The facility meets international standards for treatment of prisoners convicted by international tribunals and includes cable TV, internet access, self-contained cells, and a large recreational area. During the visit, SCSL representatives made several recommendations, including the addition of bars to the airflow space above cell doors. One representative commented that the convicts did not want to come to Rwanda, and some had threatened suicide rather than leave Sierra Leone.

14. (SBU) On October 31, Emboff met with a representative of SCSL after a follow-up visit to the Mpanga prison. The representative reported that the GOR had implemented all recommendations from the previous visit and the ward was ready to receive the transfers, commenting that it was better than any facility in Sierra Leone. She said authorities in Sierra Leone had thoroughly briefed the convicts on their transfer to Rwanda, and that the prisoners, having had ample time to say good-bye to their families, were now resigned to the decision. On October 31, SCSL chartered a MONUC flight to transport the eight convicts, 16 escorts, and one supervisor to Kigali. The plane landed around 11pm and authorities transferred the prisoners to Mpanga on November 1 after spending the night in the central prison. Two SCSL representatives will remain in Mpanga for one week to ensure a smooth transfer (Comment: Rwandan prison guards, used to dealing with relatively docile Rwandan prisoners, may have difficulty managing the Sierr Leonean prisoners, who are reported to be less responsive

to authority. End Comment.)

15. (SBU) SCSL representatives plan to make a follow-up visit to Mpanga in three months, and possibly again in six months. With the SCSL winding down, there have been discussions around establishing a small secretariat based in The Hague to deal with any residual issues and possibly to make regular reports.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The speed at which the GOR implemented the SCSL's recommendations reflects its own desire to have the ICTR as well as other countries transfer to Rwanda individuals convicted or suspected of involvement in the 1994 genocide. END COMMENT.  
SYMINGTON